

American Indian Cultural Programs/Services
Corrections Advisory Council
Aug. 12, 2008



- The Montana Department of Correction (MDOC) makes available to offenders in its facilities a range of religious services and programs, to the extent practical and with due consideration given to the safe and orderly operations of the facilities, to satisfy the beliefs and spiritual needs of all the recognized faith groups represented by those incarcerated.
- To that extent, I have compiled the religious activity schedules for Montana State Prison (MSP), Montana Women's Prison (MWP), Crossroads Correctional Center (CCC/Shelby), Cascade County (GFRP) and Dawson County (DCCF) regional prisons.
- In your binders, behind the blue tab, you will find:
 - This written report
 - A chart summarizing native cultural/religious programs by facility
 - The religious activity calendars for Montana State Prison, Montana Women's Prison, Crossroads Correctional Center, Dawson County Regional Prison and Cascade County Regional Prison, which contain highlighted references to native programs.
 - The DOC policy on religious programming
 - The section of MSP's property policy 4.1.3 that lists items approved for retention at the facilities for all religious activities.

First, some background:

- Facilities with a population of 500 or more are required to employ a full time religious coordinator. Facilities with populations under 500 will utilize appropriate staff to oversee these activities.
- Religious programs are essential to all offenders that wish to participate and the MDOC strives to offer programs for any offender that requests assistance with his/her culture.
- Many, if not all, events require outside sponsors which are very difficult to recruit and maintain and that may result in certain activities being delayed or at the worst case is canceled. Every effort is made to continue these events without cancellation.
- Religious programs and activities are crucial. All MDOC facilities that house offenders offer a wide range of programs in regard to spiritual beliefs and practices. Our goal is to offer alternatives to offenders that can lead to positive changes in behavior.

The first chart in your binder shows that Montana State Prison and Montana Women's Prison each offer 10 native programs, while Crossroads has nine. Dawson and Cascade regional prisons each have six.

All the facilities, including the Missoula Assessment and Sanction Center that is operated by Missoula County under contract with the state, provide staff training on native cultural issues. All but MASC offer smudging and all but two – MASC and the women's prison – have pipe ceremonies. Sweat lodges operate at three prisons and drum ceremonies are held in four.

Native American activities continue to improve by offering new programs as they are introduced and approved. For example:

- The Dawson County facility is developing a native American-specific program called “Firestarter,” which is an offshoot of White Bison that focuses on chemical dependency issues. Dawson County staff would like to have it up and running this fall. The facility encourages outside participants to bring cultural events to the offenders and by inviting tribal elders to the prison to provide spiritual education.
- MSP is actively recruiting volunteers for all religious activities in order to maintain these important programs. The religious coordinator maintains an inventory of religious articles including herbs, drums, and articles and literature (CD’s and DVD’s) for use by offenders.
- MWP invites outside guests for some of their programs. They have utilized guest speakers such as Don Coyhis/White Buffalo and have invited Jack Gladstone from the Blackfeet Nation, to provide an overview of American Indian culture through the use of songs, storytelling and lectures.
- CCC employs a religious activity coordinator since the prison has more than 500 inmates. John Meckling coordinates all religious activities at CCC and is to be commended on his accomplishments.
- The Great Falls regional prison offers smudging and pipe ceremony and allows the items identified in policy 4.1.3. This facility reports that it is difficult to find sponsors to supervise their activities.

Contacts at the facilities are:

- MSP: Tom Wilson/ Religious Activity Coordinator. 406-846-1320 ext 2777
- MWP: Sue Orand/Religious Activity Coordinator. 406-247-5157

- Crossroads: John Meckling/Religious Activity Coordinator, 406-434-7478 or DOC Monitor Jim Vollrath, 406-434-7415.
- Cascade County Regional: Unit Manager Steve Archuleta/Unit Manager, 406-454-7685, or DOC Monitor Wayne Bye, 406-727-1930.
- Dawson County Regional: Don LaPlant/LAC and Religious Activity Coordinator, 406-377-7600, or DOC Monitor Dale Henrich, 406-377-7687.